

Emasculation Blues: Black Male Teachers' Perspectives on Gender and Power in the Teaching Profession

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Background/Context: Over the past decade, a growing chorus of educational stakeholders has called for the recruitment of more Black men into the American teaching profession, casting these men as ideal surrogate father figures for Black youth who may lack adult male role models in their families or communities. Although a small body of scholarly work has begun to examine the gendered forms of culturally relevant pedagogies enacted by Black male teachers, critical analyses have yet to emerge on how these men negotiate the gendered power dynamics and professional culture of a traditionally female workplace.

Focus: This article presents several sets of findings from a more broadly framed study on the identities, pedagogies, and experiences of Black male teachers. Using Black masculinity studies as a conceptual framework, this article focuses specifically on Black male teachers' negotiations of workplace gender politics with women colleagues and administrators.

Participants: The 11 Black male teachers whose narratives are explored in this article were middle or high school teachers in a predominantly Black urban school district on the East Coast of the United States.

Research Design: The study described in this article was grounded in life history narrative inquiry and employed a three-interview regimen for in-depth interviewing to enable participants to construct rich and nuanced narratives of their lived experiences as Black men and as Black male teachers. Focus groups also allowed participants to co-construct understandings of the challenges and opportunities they faced as Black men in the teaching profession. Transcriptions were coded and analyzed for recurrent themes within each participant's narrative as well as across participant narratives.

Findings: Participants' life narratives revealed patriarchal gender ideologies that produced an inattention to male privilege, fueled conflictual encounters with women colleagues and administrators, and informed a desire for more male-centered spaces and interactions within the profession.

Conclusions and Recommendations: *Patriarchal gender ideologies contributed to contentious gender politics in the workplace for the men in this study. Future research should attempt to develop deeper understandings of how these ideologies may influence the experiences of Black men throughout the American teaching profession. Additionally, inquiry efforts should explore strategies for engaging Black male teachers in examinations of their complicated relationships to patriarchy and for applying a critical awareness of gender to their negotiations of gender politics in the workplace.*

In response to the chronic struggles of Black youth in American K–12 schools, a growing chorus of educational stakeholders has called for efforts to recruit more Black men into the teaching profession, given that these men constitute a mere 1% of the nation’s teaching ranks, according to recent approximations (C. Lewis, 2006). Amid palpable cultural angst over the paucity of father figures in Black families and communities (Dyson, 2008), popular press accounts have routinely cast Black male teachers as ideal surrogate father figures for Black youth, especially Black boys (Basinger, 1999; “Call Me Mister,” 2002; “Clemson’s,” 2002; Cunningham, 2001; M. Lewis, 2005; Matus, 2005; Milloy, 2004; Richard, 2005; Torres, 2006), echoing a longstanding tradition of imagining male teachers as classroom patriarchs who can restore a normative gender order to the nation’s schools (Martino, 2008a). A small body of scholarly literature has begun to critically explore the culturally relevant pedagogies and role-modeling practices that Black male teachers perform with Black students (A. L. Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2002, 2006a, 2006b), but nuanced analyses have yet to emerge of how these men negotiate their relationships with colleagues and administrators in a predominantly female profession. As popular discourses continue to construct Black male teachers as father figures for Black youth, what happens when these men, dutifully answering the call to embody and perform conventional modes of manhood in the classroom, encounter the gendered power dynamics and professional culture of a traditionally female workplace? How do men who are positioned in the popular imagination as surrogate patriarchs interact with the women in their professional midst, especially when those women outnumber and/or outrank them? Given the historical centrality of gender in determining power and participation in the American teaching profession (Martino, 2008a; Weiler, 1989), Black male teachers’ experiences with the profession’s gender politics warrant close and careful consideration.

In an effort to develop a better understanding of Black men’s gender-mediated participation in the teaching profession, this article presents a set of findings from a qualitative study on the identities and pedagogies

of 11 Black male teachers in an urban, predominantly Black school district. Over the course of the study, participants' relationships with female colleagues and administrators emerged as a complicated and sometimes conflagrantly aspect of their experiences as Black male teachers. Three recurrent themes from study data offered important insights into how these men navigated the gendered politics of participation in the teaching profession: participants' relative inattention to the significance of male privilege; their conflictual encounters with women in the workplace; and their desire for more male-centered spaces and interactions within the profession. Drawing conceptually on Black masculinity studies and methodologically on life history narrative inquiry, this article provides new insights into the dilemmas of cross-gender collegial interactions for Black male teachers, and it raises important questions for researchers, teacher educators, school officials, and other stakeholders who want to support Black men's critical considerations of gender politics in the teaching profession.

LITERATURE REVIEW: (EN)GENDERING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Several bodies of scholarly literature have examined the significance of gender in shaping the institutional structures of, and participatory politics within, the American teaching profession. Most notably, a rich corpus of historical and sociological analyses has chronicled how new economic opportunities for men in American industry, along with changing attitudes toward the classroom as an appropriate work space for women, facilitated the "feminization" of teaching, or the influx of women into the profession's ranks over the 19th century (Apple, 1986; Hoffman, 1981; Perlmann & Margo, 2001; Prentice & Theobald, 1991; Strober & Tyack, 1980; Tyack & Strober, 1981; Weiler, 1989). Against this backdrop, several scholarly works have examined how women teachers resisted male-dominated educational bureaucracies and asserted the significance of their work amid the sexist devaluation of teaching as a predominantly female profession (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999; Munro, 1998; Oram, 1996; Prentice & Theobald, 1991; Weiler, 1988). Some scholarship on gender in teaching has also explored the significance of men's participation in the profession, including several works that have analyzed the ideological underpinnings of recurrent appeals, since the late 19th century, for male teachers to "rescue" boys from the allegedly effeminizing influences of a predominantly female teaching force by modeling aggressive and virile forms of masculinity in the classroom (Kimmel, 1987; Martino, 2008a; Pleck, 1987; Weiler, 1989). An emergent body of literature has drawn on

the field of masculinity studies to examine how male teachers in contemporary K–12 educational settings in the United States negotiate the pressures to perform conventional constructions of masculinity in the classroom (Allan, 1994; King, 1998, 2004; Sargent, 2001).¹ Like the research literature on women in teaching, the recent scholarship on masculinity politics in the lives of male teachers has underscored the salience of gender in shaping participation in the nation's teaching ranks. However, this scholarship has yet to fully explore the role of masculinity politics in the lives and careers of Black men in the American teaching profession.² This article builds on and contributes to the research on gender in teaching by focusing more intentionally on the salience of gender politics in the experiences of Black male teachers.

In addition to the research literature cited above, a rich corpus of scholarship on the experiences and practices of Black educators in the United States has cast gender as a powerful mediator of participation in the teaching profession. Drawing on Black feminist and womanist conceptualizations of Black women's standpoint epistemologies, several scholars have described the unique modes of caring and discipline, the high academic expectations, the connectedness to community, and the political activism that have traditionally characterized Black women teachers' pedagogies and practices with Black students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, 2005; Case, 1997; Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002). Other works have described family and community-based mentoring and professional socialization networks among Black women teachers (Dingus, 2008a, 2008b), further underscoring the salience of gender in the lives and careers of Black women educators. Following the lead of the scholarship on Black women in teaching, Lynn's work (2002, 2006a, 2006b) has described Black male teachers' cultural connectedness with Black students, their sense of mission to raise Black youths' social consciousness and inspire change in the Black community, and their particular interest in serving as role models and father figures for young Black males. Mirroring the characterization of Black women teachers' "other mothering" (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002), Lynn (2006b) has framed Black male teachers' culturally mediated pedagogies as an "other fathering" mix of "tough love, discipline, and caring" (p. 2517). A. L. Brown's (2009) research found a range of pedagogical performances employed by Black male teachers—from a discipline-intensive "enforcer style" to less rigid alternatives—all of which were rooted in the teachers' mission to serve the needs of Black male students, and other scholars have echoed claims that Black male teachers are uniquely qualified to serve as role models for Black boys (J. W. Brown & Butty, 1999; Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Together, the scholarly works on the gendered pedagogies and pro-

professional experiences of Black teachers have contributed crucial insights into gender and culture as co-mediators of Black educators' culturally responsive pedagogies and Black women educators' entry into teaching. However, this scholarship has yet to produce nuanced analyses of Black male teachers' negotiations of the gender politics of a traditionally female professional realm. Building on the existing attention to gender, this article seeks to expand the scholarship on Blacks in teaching by exploring how and why Black male teachers respond to the gendered politics of participation in the American teaching profession.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: BLACK MASCULINITY STUDIES

Scholarship from the field of Black masculinity studies provides the conceptual framework for this article's analysis of Black male teachers. This scholarship examines the unique amalgam of fears and fascinations that fuels the social construction of Black male subjectivity and that makes Black maleness a highly visible and consequential marker of difference in the United States (Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 2001; Carbado, 1999b; Harper, 1996; Wallace, 2002). Two recurring themes within Black masculinity studies are central to this article's conceptual framework. The first is the recognition of the unique psychological, emotional, and spiritual toll of Black male marginality on Black men. Oft-cited statistics on incarceration, homicide, unemployment, high school dropout, and HIV infection rates, among other chronic blights (Dyson, 1993; Noguera, 2003), illustrate not only the systemic marginality of Black men in American society, but also their distance from patriarchal definitions of manhood that rely on White supremacist and capitalist power to reinforce male domination. In a society that assesses men by their ability to wield patriarchal power, Black males continually face a crisis of patriarchal impotence. Scholars in Black masculinity studies (Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 2001; Carbado, 1999b; Hemphill, 1991; Neal, 2005; Reid-Pharr, 2001; Young, 2007) have discussed how deep and complex psychic wounds suffered by Black men under White supremacy and capitalist oppression can manifest in anxieties over a sense of emasculation, and as discussed in the findings section of this article, the Black male teachers in this study had to negotiate their identities and positions within professional contexts that once again challenged their access to patriarchal definitions of manhood. An appreciation for the psychological burden of Black manhood unfulfilled is imperative to fully grasp how and why the men in this study responded to the gendered power dynamics that characterized their participation in the field.

The second theme from Black masculinity studies that informs this

article's analysis is the critique of patriarchal regimes within Black social contexts. This critique is derived from Black feminist scholarship on social and political movements since the mid-20th century that have repeatedly reduced Black freedom struggles to the plight of Black men, thus equating Black liberation to the restoration of Black male patriarchy (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1981; Smith, 1983). Calls issued during the Million Man March for Black men to reclaim their patriarchal perch over Black families and communities (Neal, 2005; Reid-Pharr, 2001), the male-centered narratives of racial victimhood in response to the legal troubles of figures like Clarence Thomas, O.J. Simpson, and Mike Tyson (K. Brown, 1999; Carbado, 1999a; Neal, 2005), and the recurrent references in popular discourses to the "endangered" or troubled status of Black males en masse (Carbado, 1999a; Wallace, 2002) have all fallen under scrutiny in Black masculinity studies for centering antiracist political campaigns around crises in Black manhood and for ineluctably overshadowing the urgent circumstances of the lives of Black women. These critiques have also inspired efforts to imagine and produce new modes of Black masculinity that eschew the trappings of patriarchal domination, including ruminations on how love-centered constructions of Black manhood (Byrd, 2001) and Black male engagements with Black feminism or womanism (Awkward, 1999; Lemons, 2001; Neal, 2005) might undermine patriarchal regimes in Black communities and change the very nature of Black masculine identity and expression.³ For this article, the engagement of Black feminist-influenced scholarship within Black masculinity studies informs a critical stance toward cultural discourses that imagine Black male teachers as father figures without questioning the possible positioning of these teachers as agents of patriarchal power in schools. Furthermore, it helps to shape a constructive critique of the patriarchal sensibilities espoused by some of the men in this study. While remaining sensitive to the psychological and emotional detriments of patriarchy on Black men in America, this article ultimately seeks strategies for enabling Black male teachers to resist the reproduction of patriarchy in their work within urban schools.

STUDY DESIGN

To delve deeply into the experiences of Black men in the teaching profession, this study drew methodologically on life history narrative inquiry. Like other forms of narrative inquiry, life history narratives draw on Bruner's assertion that people lead "storied lives" (cited in Alsup, 2006) and that the process of narrating our life stories reveals how we construct and understand our sense of self. What gets included in one's narrative,

how narrative elements are ordered, and the perspectives that shape the meaning of the narrative as a whole all serve as windows into the self (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007). By providing subjects with multiple opportunities to recount and construct their life stories, life history narrative research enables examinations of how social and historical forces have acted on and shaped individuals; how individuals have exercised agency in the midst of larger social and historical forces to construct their own identities; and how life experiences across temporal and spatial contexts have combined to inform individuals' emergent sense of self (Denzin, 1989; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Munro, 1998). In this study, the use of life history narratives afforded rich and in-depth analyses of each participant's understanding of his life experiences as a Black man in the United States and his professional experiences as a Black male teacher in an urban school.

With life history narrative inquiry as a methodological anchor, data collection procedures for this study were designed to provide participants with multiple opportunities to construct and reflect on their lived experiences as Black men and as Black male teachers. The sequence of data collection procedures was guided by Seidman's (1998) regimen for in-depth interviewing, which calls for three separate interviews with each study participant: (1) an initial life history interview, which helps to situate the participant's experiences with a particular social phenomenon within the context of his or her life circumstances; (2) a second interview focusing on specific details of the participant's lived experiences with the social phenomenon in question; and (3) a concluding interview in which the participant clarifies details from the previous interviews and reflects on the overall meaning of the experiences he or she has recounted. This three-interview sequence provides the researcher with each study participant's account of his or her experience with the phenomenon under investigation, while also supplying additional biographical information that is crucial for contextualizing each participant's account.

Protocols for all data collection sessions appear in Appendix A. Following Seidman's (1998) regimen, data collection began with an in-depth life history interview with each participant. After responding to several "warm-up" questions regarding background information, entry into the teaching profession, and current teaching assignments, the bulk of the first interview explored participants' racial and gendered identity formation experiences across their life spans. Asking participants to define their racial and gender identities allowed the author to honor their definitions of self and to tailor interview questions accordingly.⁴ Using identity terminology provided by participants, the author asked the men in this study during the first interview to explain the relationship

between their racial and gender identities and to describe how their racial and gender identities had shaped childhood, adolescent, and adulthood experiences across multiple social contexts. The first interview concluded with prompts for participants to describe identities other than race and gender that had played significant roles in informing their sense of self, thus allowing them to provide additional layers of specificity and complexity to their identity narratives.

After generating rich biographical overviews of participants' life experiences as Black men during the first interview, a narrower focus on their teaching experiences defined the second of the three study interviews. Participants were asked to consider the potential influence of several factors on their professional experiences as Black male teachers, including their pedagogical stances, instructional practices, classroom management styles, and relationships with students, fellow teachers, administrators, and parents. As they reflected on these factors, participants were asked to describe the particular role, if any, of Black maleness in shaping various aspects of their experiences in the teaching profession. The emphasis throughout the second interview on the challenges and opportunities characterizing participants' professional experiences offered an ideal backdrop for questions about available or potential supports for Black men in teaching, which were posed at the end of this interview.

The third and final one-on-one interview provided participants with the chance to speak about their involvement in this study. After reflecting on any major issues that had emerged in their teaching experiences since previous study-related contacts, participants were asked to recall their reasons for agreeing to take part in this study, describe what, if anything, they had gained from or enjoyed about their participation in the study, and suggest which aspects of the study design might be modified in future iterations of this project. Participants were also asked to describe their hopes for how the study findings would ultimately be used. This third interview thus enabled the men in this study to offer their unique feedback on this research project as the individuals who actually had experienced it, and the interview also allowed the author to take stock of the wishes of those who had made invaluable contributions to this scholarly investigation.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, focus group sessions were conducted to enable study participants to collectively explore and negotiate the significance of their experiences as Black male teachers. Two focus group sessions were held, one with 5 participants and the other with 4, and the composition of each focus group was determined by the participants' availability (with no participant attending both focus groups). During both sessions, the author asked participants to revisit

three major themes that had emerged across one-on-one interviews: the presumed status of Black male teachers as role models and father figures; the relationships between Black male teachers and Black male students; and potential strategies for recruiting, retaining, and supporting Black men in the teaching profession. These topics were intentionally revisited during both focus groups to generate more opportunities for triangulation across data sources and to enable participants to discuss their perspectives on these key issues with other Black male teachers. Several related topics also emerged in the course of both focus groups, and time was deliberately reserved toward the end of the sessions for participants to raise concerns that had not been addressed.

All data collection sessions were conducted as semistructured interviews to allow for unanticipated topics and insights to surface while still ensuring some continuity of themes across data sources. Several strategies for in-depth interviewing described by Lichtman (2006) were employed to make sure that key issues were addressed while enabling enough flexibility for participants to narrate their life experiences on their own terms. These strategies included introductory questions that framed key themes broadly enough to allow participants a number of possible angles from which to respond, and probing questions that asked participants to clarify their statements and provide illustrative anecdotes when possible. Another interviewing strategy, the repetition of participant responses in the interviewer's own words, allowed the author to check his understanding of participants' statements with their intended meanings. In several cases, this strategy prompted participants to identify and correct the author's misinterpretations or critique the author's assumptions about the relevance of emergent study themes to their particular life narratives. Together, the use of semistructured interviews and in-depth interviewing techniques helped the author to wed prestudy conceptual frameworks with iterative adaptations of those frameworks that more accurately captured participants' insights and perspectives.

In all, data collection extended from January to October 2007 for 9 study participants, and from October 2007 to February 2008 for 2 participants who were enrolled later in the study and consequently were not included in focus group sessions. Each of the first two in-depth interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes, and the third an average of 30 minutes. Each focus group lasted just under 2 hours. In total, approximately 44 hours of one-on-one and focus group interviews were recorded for this study, producing lengthy and detailed accounts that allowed for rich descriptions of participants' perspectives. All data collection sessions were recorded with a digital audio recorder and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate reproductions of participants' narratives.

Whereas data analysis was iterative and ongoing throughout the study, formal analytic procedures lasted from September 2007 to April 2008. Two principal concerns—participants’ constructions and negotiations of their identities as Black men, and participants’ perspectives on their pedagogies and professional experiences as Black male teachers—drove the generation and arrangement of coding schemes. Overall, data analysis consisted of three phases. In the first phase of analysis, one-on-one interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed to develop an initial sense of the range of themes across data sources. Based on this review, a tentative list of coding schemes was generated. In the second phase of analysis, data on each participant were revisited and triangulated across lengthy narrative passages to construct an individual participant profile. Although certain codes began to emerge as recurrent across several participant profiles, the primary focus during the second phase of data analysis remained on identifying the significant themes in and specific nuances of each participant’s life narrative. Constructing individual participant profiles before triangulating data across multiple participant narratives helped the author to avoid misinterpretations of the former in service of the latter; in other words, individual participant profiles forced a reckoning with each participant’s narrative on its own terms, regardless of whether those terms seemed to indicate a significant study finding. In the third phase of data analysis, participant profiles were analyzed together to finish honing codes and arranging them into overarching categories, and to apply codes to the triangulation of data across multiple participant narratives. Most of the emergent themes that came into relief during this third phase of data analysis recurred in multiple passages across four or more participant narratives. A sample of transcription coding from the third phase of data analysis appears in Appendix B. Overall, the three phases of data analysis afforded in-depth examinations of each participant’s negotiations of the challenges and triumphs he had experienced over his life as a Black man and as a Black male teacher, as well as broader considerations of the commonalities that spanned multiple participants’ life narratives.

The data collection and analysis procedures described above were crucial for allowing the author to achieve his research aims. The goal of this study was not to test a particular hypothesis about Black male teachers, but rather to explore the ways in which the experiences of being Black men in the teaching profession were meaningful for study participants. Thus, it was crucial to obtain and identify multiple indications of what being a Black male teacher meant for the men in this study. The three in-depth interviews with each participant, along with the two focus groups, provided these indications in a rich and nuanced fashion. As noted, the

semistructured interview format and the intentional use of various in-depth interviewing techniques allowed for some continuity of themes across data sources while also enabling participants to correct any misinterpretations by the author and raise questions or concerns that the author may have overlooked, thus helping the author to produce accurate representations of participants' perspectives. Revisiting emergent themes from previous data collection sessions during the third one-on-one interviews and during the focus groups was another strategy that allowed the author to check his understanding of participants' perspectives. Feedback from members of the author's writing group also helped to refine the analysis of data from this study.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonyms for the research context and study participants are used throughout this article to protect participants' anonymity. All the participants in this study were employed at the time of data collection at various public schools in Brewerton, a large urban center on the East Coast. Black youth constituted the majority of the Brewerton School District's student body, and most Brewerton schools offered free or reduced-price meal programs for all their students.⁵ Like many urban districts, the Brewerton School District struggled with scarce financial and material resources, student underperformance on high-stakes testing, high student dropout rates, and high teacher and administrative turnover.

Participation in this study was limited to Black male educators with middle and high school teaching experiences to draw on and speak to the greater presence of male teachers at those levels. Efforts were also made to recruit teachers from schools with sizeable percentages of Black students in order to investigate claims of a special connectedness between Black male teachers and Black youth. Participants were identified and recruited through personal contacts and professional networks to which the author had access, and purposeful sampling was used to achieve some diversity of background experiences and teaching subjects. Table 1 provides a demographic summary of the participants.

RESEARCHER PERSPECTIVES AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

As with any qualitative inquiry, the interpretive lens of the researcher played an important role in this study. The author's status as a Black male researcher, teacher educator, and former K-12 instructor afforded a familiarity and rapport with study participants that proved crucial in

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Study Participants

Participant	Age	Grade Level	Subject Area	Years of Teaching
Bill Drexler	< 30	High school	Humanities	< 5
Damon Hubert	< 30	Middle school	Humanities	< 5
Felix Jones	< 30	High school	Math/Science	< 5
Greg Poland	30–39	Middle school*	Humanities	≥ 10
Ira Walker	30–39	High school	Humanities	5–9
Karl Reardon	< 30	Middle school	Humanities	< 5
Mitch Abrams	< 30	Middle school	Math/Science	< 5
Oliver Currington	≥ 40	High school	Humanities	≥ 10
Quincy Stinson	< 30	Middle school	Humanities	< 5
Solomon Yardley	< 30	High school	Math/Science	< 5
Victor Rollins	≥ 40	Middle school	Humanities	5–9

*Grade level prior to study, constituting half of overall teaching experience

earning their trust and eliciting their detailed narratives. Yet despite his insider status, the author intentionally resisted presumptions that his identities, experiences, and perspectives as a Black male educator necessarily mirrored those of his study participants. The data collection and analysis procedures described above helped the author to carefully and respectfully note moments of overlap and divergence between his assumptions and the perspectives of the men who so generously contributed to this study.

Although the study described in this article was carefully designed to unearth participants' unique perspectives on their experiences as Black male teachers in an urban, predominantly Black school district, it was not without its limitations. The self-reported nature of the data, along with the locally bound study sample, works against the generalizability of study findings. Nevertheless, the recurrent themes presented next point to several issues that beg for closer examination in future research on the lives and work of Black male teachers. These issues will be explored in the discussion and implications section of this article.

FINDINGS

Popular discourses on Black male teachers as surrogate father figures for Black children have yet to delve into the potentially murky waters of gendered participatory politics in the teaching profession. In contrast to the silence heretofore on such matters, the narratives collected through this study articulated powerful portraits of participants' conflictual negotiations of gender politics in the workplace. Three recurrent themes underscored the salience of participatory gender politics for the men in this study: participants' inattention to male privilege; their conflictual encounters with women colleagues and administrators; and their desire for more male-centered spaces and interactions within the profession. These themes are described next.

INATTENTION TO MALE PRIVILEGE

Data collection procedures for this study provided opportunities for participants to trace the salience of identity categories across the multiple spatial and temporal contexts of their life experiences. As participants' experiential narratives began to unfold in initial one-on-one life history interviews, 6 of the men in this study expressed perspectives on gender identity that revealed a common blind eye to the impact of male privilege, and one of these men, along with a seventh participant, articulated understandings of gender differences that further underscored an inattention to maleness as a source and site of power. These perspectives are highlighted in the narrative excerpts that follow, and they provide an illuminating backdrop for later accounts of participants' negotiations of gender in the predominantly female domain of teaching.

The salience of Blackness and Black masculinity proved critical in producing a blind eye to male privilege among the men in this study. Six participants—Bill, Damon, Karl, Mitch, Quincy, and Solomon—viewed Blackness and sometimes Black maleness as the key determinants of their marginalized positionalities in society at large. Hence, although these men stressed the importance of Blackness and Black maleness as consequential markers of difference, they attributed less significance to maleness alone as an identity category or a potential source of power. The following brief excerpts from individual participant narratives illustrate this pattern:

QUINCY: I don't tend to think about being male in the abstract sense because when I'm walking around, I guess society as a whole views males as the main thing. So I could be

wearing a dress and that could confuse them, but I'm still Black, you know what I'm saying.

DAMON: I think that being Black is bigger than being a male. Because I feel like as much as there's gender bias and et cetera, et cetera, ultimately, no matter what I am, you can physically look at me, automatically [snaps finger], "Black. He's Black."

KARL: I think being a Black or African American person is something that stands alone outside of the actual gender issue. I feel like being a Black person in America, that usually comes before gender. [I identify as] "Black" and then "Black male."

BILL: I think about sexist theory and how, you know . . . but I don't think I think about my maleness. I don't think about it as being an advantage or disadvantage. I just don't think I think about it.

SOLOMON: Whereas the Blackness puts me in a state of less power, the maleness puts me in a state of more power. So I'm not as concerned about my maleness.

MITCH: Culture [i.e., being Black] is something I think about a lot more, and it's much more a salient topic personally than gender is to me.

These comments capture a recurring theme throughout the narratives of the 6 participants cited above. In contrast to the prominence of Blackness and Black maleness in their identities and racialized worldviews, little to no attention was devoted to maleness as an independent category of identity. Although the White supremacist surveillance of racial differences heightened these men's awareness of their Blackness and Black maleness as axes of marginalization, their potential (albeit constrained) access to male privilege generally received minimal attention as they articulated their worldviews and sense of self as Black men in America.

In addition to a relative inattentiveness to maleness as a source of power among the 6 participants cited above, 2 participants articulated frameworks for understanding gender differences that seemed to further occlude potential critiques of male privilege. One of those participants

was Mitch. While explaining his views on gender during his first study interview, Mitch noted that “liberated women” tended to object to his more traditional desire to date women who were willing to cook. When asked to elaborate on this, Mitch provided the following overview of the functionality of gender roles:

I think that gender roles are a necessity to society. I think they provide some sort of stability to a society, and that they kind of evolved in that way. They evolved as just a necessary thing to provide stability, just as a lot of other things. There are just like a lot of other systems of government, just keeping groups of people in check. It's not something that's necessarily a problem. . . . I'm not saying that there's me, you know, going and taking out the trash and cutting the grass is better than you cooking. I feel like they're equal. I just feel like I'm not gonna let a woman that I'm like, if I am in a relationship—because this usually is the realm of relationships—I would never let my woman cut the grass or take out the trash. I never let her do anything like that. I'm not against her doing it. I don't feel like it's not something they can do. I just feel like, you know, there's things that men should do, there's things that women should do.

In this passage, Mitch framed gender roles not as an antiwomanist tool of subjugation, but as a functionalist system for providing societal order and stability, much like systems of government. Although he went on to acknowledge the greater status frequently accorded to male roles in American society, Mitch distinguished the hierarchal character of gender roles from what he viewed as their utility in establishing social order. Concluding ultimately that “there's things that men should do, there's things that women should do,” Mitch's perspective delineated and justified clear boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of men and women.

Another study participant who articulated a framework for understanding gender difference was Victor. In contrast to his belief in the socially constructed nature of race, Victor viewed gender differences as biologically rooted and stable, as he explained during his first one-on-one interview:

With Blackness and Whiteness, that is a construct, but with male and female, it's not a construct. I mean, I got a penis. You know

what I mean? And she's got a vagina. It's just like real, real clear. But after that, ok, after that there's a lot of gray areas. I mean, as far as roles that females can play, roles that men can play, you know, there are gray areas. But then fundamentally, we're different. I really do believe fundamentally, males and females, we're different. Our wiring, our hormones, our everything. But on the racial thing, I don't see the differences as stark like that. Those differences are constructs otherwise, but the male/female thing, I don't see it as a construct. I mean, and they say, "Oh, well, we're socialized to be feminine, or we're socialized to be this and this." But then some of it is just wiring, you see it in kids and in their play. So that's, yeah, you get into deep stuff.

In this passage, Victor's references to male and female genitalia grounded gender difference in biological terms. Briefly noting the potential for some "gray areas," Victor ultimately returned to biologically rooted grounds to explain his view of the inherent differences between men and women. Although the premise of his biologically deterministic framework diverged from Mitch's functionalist paradigm, Victor ultimately arrived at the same conclusion: There are fundamental and justifiable factors that differentiate men and women.

All 7 participants cited above repeatedly expressed an acute awareness of the systemic nature of White supremacy throughout their narratives. This palpable racial consciousness stood in stark contrast to their general inattentiveness to the presence and consequences of male privilege, as exhibited in the preceding narrative excerpts. That this blind eye to male privilege initially surfaced in participants' first one-on-one interviews, which focused broadly on their life narratives as Black men, suggests that a wide expanse of lived experiences beyond teaching conspired to obfuscate maleness as a node of power for these men. Nevertheless, because teachers' lives beyond the classroom influence their identities and pedagogies within schools, study participants' inattention to male privilege across multiple experiential contexts offers a crucial backdrop for understanding their negotiations of gendered power dynamics in the teaching profession.

ENCOUNTERS WITH WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

As noted earlier, a small body of emergent scholarship has begun to examine Black male teachers' interactions with Black youth, but nuanced analyses have yet to emerge on how Black male teachers negotiate collegial relationships upon entering the traditionally female realm of the

American teaching profession. Addressing this void, 6 participants in this study offered descriptive accounts of conflictual relationships with women in the workplace. The majority of these accounts revolved around antagonistic encounters with women in leadership positions, and a few spotlighted particular tensions with Black female colleagues and administrators. Excerpts from these accounts are provided in this section.

Oliver was one of the study participants who recalled contentious dynamics with women administrators. During a one-on-one interview, Oliver described his ire for a female assistant principal who, in his view, had overstepped her bounds one day by interrupting his class and challenging his authority in front of his students. While providing this description, Oliver also offered a broader treatise on women in positions of authority, as captured in this exchange with the author:

OLIVER: I find that there are some women that feel so insecure that they have to oversee men who are strong, as I told you in my case with my assistant principal, that they figure, well, “I am the boss here and because I’m the boss. . . ” and this kind of thing, and I don’t fall for that nonsense. If it’s not right, I’m not doing it, you know what I mean. So I find that the women’s rights, and the women wanting to be bosses and lead and those kinds of things, has sort of like gone over the top a little bit in that they figure that in order to lead, that they need to be bosses, and that’s not necessarily the case. Whatever the term boss means, you know.

AUTHOR: Does it mean they have to be masculine?

OLIVER: Aggressive. But you see, I don’t necessarily associate that with masculinity, but that they have to be aggressive and have to be, you know, be the aggressor. And I get the feeling that a lot of women love whipping men and love castrating men, you know. And that turns me off. You’re not going to cut my balls off [chuckle].

Oliver referred to the incident with his assistant principal again during a focus group session, using strikingly similar language to vent his frustration:

I find that lots of women in authoritative positions—principals, assistant principals, and so on—they get that position and they

think that, you know, to be an assistant principal I must cut a man's balls off or something to prove their point. . . . I definitely think that women who are in authoritative positions in the school district or in school have this thing with strong men. I think we as men have to stand up and say you're not [inaudible]. You could be [the superintendent], you don't come and tell me what to do in my classroom in front of my students.

In both of these passages, the castration metaphor was deployed by Oliver to demonize the power of women in leadership positions. Stating that these women felt like they had to “cut a man's balls off or something to prove their point,” Oliver attributed women administrators' overly assertive leadership styles to their own insecurities as authority figures, especially in the presence of “strong men.” Furthermore, suggesting that women's rights and women's desire for leadership have “gone over the top a little bit,” Oliver framed women administrators' exercise of power as excessive—so much so, in fact, that this power had become emasculating. Through his own contention that he would not stand for the emasculating use of women administrators' power, Oliver seemed to assert and protect his own masculine integrity in the face of an insecure female power gone amuck. During his final one-on-one interview, when asked which emergent themes from the study had left a lasting impression on him, Oliver cited his critiques of “female leadership in schools” and the “overly aggressive women in the school district,” and he expressed some surprise that other participants in his focus group, in his view, had not been as troubled by these dilemmas as he was. For Oliver, gender unequivocally mediated his lens on female leadership because excessive assertions of power by women administrators were intended to have an emasculating effect on the strong men under their charge.

Frustrations with women in authority positions were also voiced by Victor. At several points in his narrative, Victor described and critiqued perceptions among his Black female colleagues that he and other Black male teachers were reluctant to listen to women with authority. After challenging that perception, Victor provided a broader portrait of the tensions between women administrators and male teachers, as captured in this exchange with the author during a one-on-one interview:

VICTOR: So this whole chauvinism, feminism aspect and its impact on men, that's . . . yea, the whole role of feminism, the feminists . . . feminism, what impact it's having on, you know, relationships between Black men and Black women. I think in your research. . .

AUTHOR: That's something to tease out?

VICTOR: Yeah. Like what role does this feminism thing have?

AUTHOR: And what are you defining as feminism?

VICTOR: Women feeling empowered. Women having, women being empowered . . . you know, women being in power. Which there's nothing wrong with them being in power, but alright, if you're in power, but then . . . I don't know, it's hard. Yeah, just women being in power and what . . . women being in power when still men are the ones that have the power. And this tension that it causes, that it's causing. Like, for example, the female administrator, there's this notion that she always has to constantly prove herself, so there's this tension. Like she's proven herself and then this man is not listening to her, so then there's this tension or this dynamic around that.

AUTHOR: Sort of preventing her from successfully proving herself?

VICTOR: Yeah, which she already has. Like, "You're the administrator, you have the power. Use it. Do your thing. I'm not stopping you." But there's sometimes the perception that you're stopping them or you're not listening to them, going against them.

This passage revealed an intriguing tension in Victor's perspectives on female leadership. Toward the end of the excerpt, Victor insisted that despite perceptions to the contrary, he willingly acknowledged the power of women administrators and did not attempt to stand in their way. However, Victor also framed the inherent contradiction of "women being in power when still men are the ones that have the power." This echoed a sentiment that Victor expressed at another moment in his narrative, when he stated that women struggled to grapple with authority because "sometimes they get it mixed up because they see power still associated with the penis." A recurrent thread and source of tension in Victor's narrative was that women might occupy positions of authority, but power still resided in what women lacked: the phallus.

Equally revealing from the above excerpt were Victor's hesitations. His repetition of "feminist" and "feminism" conveyed a level of uncertainty

and/or discomfort that prompted the author to ask him for clarification. In the middle of the exchange when Victor paused and stated, “I don’t know, it’s hard,” his own exasperation with the tensions he was describing came to the surface. Throughout this passage, it was apparent that Victor was torn between two opposing influences: his frustration with being perceived as a malicious threat to female authority, and his ambivalence toward the legitimacy of that authority. This contradiction produced a palpable level of angst toward his encounters with women administrators in his school.

As demonstrated, Victor and Oliver had broader theses on the excessiveness and illegitimacy of female administrative power. Other participants offered accounts that focused more on tensions with specific female administrators, but nonetheless produced revealing insights into their perspectives on women in leadership. For instance, repeated clashes with his White female principal were a recurrent theme in Karl’s narrative. In a one-on-one interview, Karl stated, “My principal is a yeller. As soon as she starts yelling, boom, I cut her off. I don’t even process what she’s saying. I’m just like, this bitch is yelling at me. Like, what is her problem?” Frustrated references to his principal as a “bitch” arose at other moments as well. For instance, during his final one-on-one interview, as he recapped a particularly antagonistic argument with his principal at the end of the school year, Karl vented, “She’s a bitch. . . You’re harassing me. Get the hell out of my face, sloppy bitch. I hate her.” Although many of Karl’s critiques of his principal primarily targeted her antagonistic communicative style and abrasive rapport with teachers—issues that commonly emerge as sources of strife between teachers and administrators—his exasperated and repeated references to his principal as a “bitch” indicated gender as a mediating factor in his disdain for her.

Like Karl, Greg described a strained relationship with his White female principal. In fact, it was after one of Karl’s accounts of his principal’s prickly demeanor during a focus group session that Greg also broached this topic, leading to a discussion of strategic, masculinist responses to excessive uses of authority by women administrators. The following is an excerpt from that discussion with comments from Greg and the author:

GREG: My principal, a White woman, she speaks . . . a lot of the staff members have said they don’t like the way that she speaks to them. And I said, “Well why do you allow her to speak to you in such a way?” And she’s never spoken to me in such a way. There was only one incident where she raised her voice and [chuckle]. . . . We were on the

phone and I said [raises his voice], “Excuuuse me?” And she paused and then she [All: laughter] lulled a bit and then, you know, went on with the conversation. But I don’t know [All: laughter], I don’t know if it’s because I’m a Black man—I think so—that she doesn’t speak to me in such a way.

AUTHOR: Was that just an instinctual reaction, or did you do that intentionally?

GREG: Who, mine? Oh no, I did it intentionally, intentionally, to let her know you got the wrong one. Like, wait a minute.

By raising his voice to “let her know you got the wrong one,” Greg seemed able to wield a Black male assertiveness to dissuade further disrespect from his White female principal. This account prompted other participants in the focus group session to prod Greg for tips on how to handle confrontational moments like this with women administrators, to which Greg responded by encouraging the use of “bass” in one’s voice. In this exchange, a masculinist posturing emerged as a tactic for countering excessive assertions of power by women in leadership positions, further underscoring the potentially contentious nature of these encounters for the men in this study.

Like Greg, Quincy also described a masculinist posturing in response to women administrators. During the same focus group session, following Greg’s suggestion to put “bass” in one’s voice when responding to out-of-line women administrators, Quincy offered this account of how he managed his relationship with the mostly Black female administrative team at his school:

It’s weird because I don’t have a lot of these interactions. Anytime [the female administrators] have ever tried to get out of sorts, they instantly apologize without me having to say anything. Like I just kind of look at them like “there must be something wrong going on here.” So, you know, they’ll be like “Oh I’m sorry.” My female colleagues—Black, White, whatever—they get it all the time, you know what I’m saying. Anytime there’s a little power trip issue like that, it’s instantly popping off like that. But for me, as I said, anytime they even get a little bit out of sorts, either they’ll apologize instantly right there, or they’ll come back and apologize 5 minutes later or whatever. . . . It just is that instant kind of “Oops, I did something wrong, I need to check

myself.” And for me I just kind of stand and say, “Alright, it’s fine with me, just don’t do it again.”

In this passage, Quincy’s strategies for keeping women administrators at bay revolved around a strategically masculinist posturing of his own. The flash of his “there must be something wrong going on here” look, as well as his “just don’t do it again” demeanor during women administrators’ apparent lapses of judgment, echoed Greg’s use of his deep voice to establish boundaries with his female principal. In both cases, masculinist posturing was cited as a tactic for placing excessive female power in check and for reasserting male power in the face of higher ranked women administrators.

Although some of the study participants’ contentious cross-gender encounters occurred with White women in positions of authority, it was the excessive exercise of female power, not White womanhood, that fell under scrutiny in participants’ accounts. By contrast, 2 participants attributed difficult interactions with Black female administrators and teacher colleagues to deep-seated tensions specifically with Black women. One of these participants was Mitch. In the following exchange with the author during a one-on-one interview, Mitch discussed his frustrations with the nagging authoritative style of the predominantly Black female leadership team at his school:

MITCH: I’m always late with turning in stuff. Paperwork, all that other, you know, the rigmarole of being a teacher, all that kind of stuff. I’m always late with it. Always. Very rarely do I turn it in on time. Even less rarely do I turn it in early. And they’re always like, “Mr. Abrams, when are you gonna get this done, Mr. Abrams? You gotta get this done. Mr. Abrams, stop fucking up. Get your shit done.” And they’ll say that to me. They’ll be like, “Get your shit done. I’m not gonna play with you. You need to get your shit done.”

AUTHOR: These are Black women saying this to you?

MITCH: Yeah. “I’m not gonna sit here and play with you. You know what you need to do. Stop, get it done.” And that’s how they approach me most of the time. They treat me like I treat my kids, and I react like my kids react. I’m just like quiet and I’m like “Okay, yeah.” Then, “Okay yeah, what? Are you gonna do something, or are you just

gonna say okay yeah?” “I guess I should do. . . .” “You should or you’re going to?” [M. imitates “assertive Black woman” voice throughout this]

Mitch’s description of the badgering style of Black female administrators mirrored his characterization of his Black female teacher colleagues, as captured in this exchange with the author:

MITCH: As a Black male I’m a little bit more laidback than the Black woman. The Black female is kind of going to keep her foot like in your back. She’s going to keep it. She’s going to nag you to death until you fix it and is never going to let up. Like there’s no let up there. . . . The Black woman’s gonna come to you and tell you, “Move. What are you doing? Didn’t I just tell you that you’re supposed to be over there? Get over there!”

AUTHOR: So to what do you attribute that difference?

MITCH: Being a Black woman, I guess. I don’t know. Black men are just laid. . . . I think it’s just a guy thing really. The male thing, just being kind of more even-keeled than the hormonal woman, where you kind of just [imitates nagging noise], [inaudible] their estrogen.

Observing that “the Black female is kind of going to keep her foot like in your back,” Mitch ascribed a domineering and excessive authoritative style in this excerpt to his Black female colleagues, one that mirrored his accounts of the relentless nagging of Black women in his school’s leadership team. That he then ascribed his colleagues’ overbearing style to “being a Black woman” and being “the hormonal woman” offered essentialist nods to the sources of gender difference and supplied further evidence that Mitch sometimes found the presence of his Black women colleagues challenging.

Victor was another participant who spoke to the difficulties of negotiating collegial relationships specifically with Black women. Like Mitch, Victor described a relentlessly nagging interactional style displayed at times by his Black female colleagues, and he even speculated that a “bad hair day” or menstrual cycle may be to blame for his colleagues’ unpredictable “mood swings.” Although Victor often espoused biologically rooted notions of gender difference, his lens on the tensions he encountered with Black women colleagues extended beyond biological

explanations. At one point, Victor linked the stresses of his cross-gender encounters with more widespread friction between Black men and Black women:

I'm not a sociologist, but there have been noted tensions in research where, first of all, you have the Black man. I mean, going back to the whole slavery notion where the Black men were separated and then after the separation, you may even have been forced to mate with somebody who wasn't necessarily your love interest. So these tensions, and then further tensions with the whole welfare thing, where men would have to leave the house. So you know, there are just these tensions with Black men and Black women, they're larger. And then Black men, on ourselves, we feel a little like we, the perception that we're disempowered and we're being emasculated. I mean, our issues of our own Black, maybe even our own insecurities where some of our own insecurities make the way we deal with women, perception or reality, like we won't listen to them because we've already been emasculated. We feel that we've been emasculated, so "why listen to them?" So I think those bigger issues play out in the workplace, play out even in relationships.

In this passage, Victor pointed to the broad historical legacies of White supremacy and capitalist oppression as contexts for the complicated relationships between Black men and Black women, both in society at large and within schools. Interestingly, against this broader backdrop, Victor also implicated Black men's own anxieties around masculinity as potential contributing factors to cross-gender tensions. In fact, by situating gender relations against the historical narrative of Black oppression, Victor was able to consider the possibility that Black men's own insecurities around emasculation might lend some truth to Black female colleagues' perceptions of Black men's aversion to the advice of women. The socio-historical contextualization of Black gender relations thus produced an important momentary shift in Victor's narrative on the encounters between Black men and Black women. However, this shift was short-lived, as his frustrations with women colleagues and administrators returned to center stage in subsequent narrative accounts.

In sum, women in the workplace, especially those in positions of authority, exerted an undeniable presence across the narratives of the 6 study participants cited above. The preceding narrative excerpts revealed participants' perspectives on the excessiveness and illegitimacy of women administrators' authority, the usefulness of masculinist posturing to

counter that authority, and the challenging nature of working specifically with Black women administrators and colleagues. A key theme cutting across all these narrative accounts was the assault on and defense of male privilege. From defending themselves from the indignities of emasculating female authority to reasserting their masculinity in the presence of female power run amuck, the consolidation of male privilege underlay participants' responses to women of authority and influence in the workplace. These contentious encounters revealed the gendered politics of participation in the teaching profession as a crucial theme to explore in the lives of the Black male teachers in this study.

MALE-CENTERED INTERACTIONS AND SPACE

Participants' perspectives on gender in the teaching profession were brought into further relief as they spoke about the possibilities of more connections with other men who were employed in schools. In all, 8 participants expressed some interest in having access to more male-centered interactions and spaces within the teaching profession. This shared interest is described next.

Ruminations over working with male principals, especially as an alternative to contending with female administrators, were one way in which participants expressed their interest in connecting with other men in urban schools. While chronicling his stressful past with women administrators and colleagues during a one-on-one interview, Victor wondered aloud about the prospect of having a male principal:

I've heard people say, "Oh, it's wonderful when you have a male principal. It's totally different. I like working for a male principal." I've never even had that experience at all, so I don't even know what that is like. It would be interesting to have that experience, to have a male administrator and see the difference, to have something to compare to.

Like Victor, Karl also expressed curiosity about what it would be like to have a male principal. Raising this prospect during a focus group session sparked the following exchange between Karl, Greg, and the author:

KARL: Something else I thought about, too. Terrence Carlisle who's at. . .

GREG: Oh yeah. He was my principal.

KARL: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. Thinking about that there are very few Black male principals even, I was curious to know, do you feel like having him as a Black male was any different, or was that a bonus, a positive? Because I had strongly considered trying to transfer there. I know the kids are . . . it's a wild neighborhood. [G: Mmm-hmmm] But I was hoping that under his leadership, it might be a little different. So I don't know, maybe you could speak to that.

GREG: He's very positive towards Black males. Black male teachers, he seeks out leaders. He expects a lot from you, being a Black male. He was good. I just got tired of the students. . . . But he was a good principal. He didn't want me to leave, so that says something.

AUTHOR: You felt wanted.

GREG: Yeah, he put all his men in positions. He moved out the women, which I thought was kind of wrong, but he was in charge, and I was a Black male so I didn't really. . . [All: laughter]

AUTHOR: "It worked for me."

GREG: He put all his strong Black men in leadership positions. So that's kind of the mentality that he has.

In this exchange, the prospect of having a Black male principal represented, for Karl, a more supportive alternative to his contentious relationship with his White female principal. Greg's account of his prior experience with a Black male principal not only supported Karl's speculation but also depicted a radical shift in the gendered power dynamics that were being discussed by participants in the focus group, as Greg's former Black male principal decided to "move out the women" and put "his strong Black men in leadership positions." Importantly, although Greg noted that this decision worked to his advantage as a Black man, he also went on to state that he thought this decision was "kind of wrong" on the part of his former principal; that he benefited from an apparent consolidation of Black patriarchal power did not mean that he wholly approved of it. However, this implicit critique did not undermine the overall thrust of this exchange: In a school district where women occupied a

number of administrative positions, the male principal represented an intriguing alternative to female leadership.

The possibilities of male-centered interactions also surfaced in ruminations over the creation of male-centered spaces within schools. This theme was articulated most explicitly by Victor, who talked at length about his sense of isolation as one of the few male teachers in his school. What Victor envisioned was a more stable space where men in his school could come together on a consistent basis, as he described in this passage from a one-on-one interview:

At our school, right, the ladies' bathroom was nice. It was a place to go and hang out or whatever. They fixed it all up nice and everything. And I asked the dudes, "Man, our bathroom is horrible. Why don't we do something to make our space. . . ." Just having a decent bathroom for the men to go in and chill, you know, to get away. That would have just been cool. Because the ladies had a little space. They could just go and they could chill in their bathroom. I mean, in our bathroom, you would just get in and get out of there because it was just horrible. So that would be one of the key things I would do; I would make the bathrooms a haven for men. Go in there, read the newspaper, chill. And, I don't think I would make it specific to Black men because we, I think through our struggles, we've learned how to negotiate and mediate the racial issue. But like I said, there's still these gender things that I'm still grappling with, and if I had other guys and we could come around and have lunch or just bond or have space. Like I said, it can be isolating sometimes, being a male teacher in a school. So if the men kind of knew that "alright, this was our space and we could be there," I think that would be cool.

In this excerpt, Victor cited his isolation as a male teacher on a predominantly female faculty, along with his ongoing efforts to grapple with gender differences, as cause for creating a male space within his school. Such a space would potentially mitigate the isolation and gender tensions that male teachers experienced by providing a respite from the challenges of cross-gender encounters and a haven for male connections and bonding. While the men's bathroom served as an example in the preceding passage, Victor's conceptualization of male spaces in other narrative excerpts ranged from casual but consistent discussions among male teachers over lunch to schoolwide programming that would bring together male teachers, male students, and their male guardians. That Victor envisioned such a space in the passage as serving male teachers

regardless of race underscored the salience of gender in his teaching experiences as an axis of difference.

Given Victor's desire to connect with male colleagues, his participation in a focus group session with other participants was a standout experience for him during this study. In this regard, Victor was not alone. Of the 9 teachers who participated in the focus group sessions for this study, 7—Bill, Damon, Greg, Karl, Oliver, Quincy, and Victor—identified the focus groups as a standout aspect of the study during their final interviews, often noting that they had rarely, if ever, experienced similar opportunities to share their perspectives with other Black male teachers. Four of these men (Bill, Damon, Greg, and Quincy) stated that they would have preferred even more focus group sessions, and Damon suggested hosting a larger summit-type gathering for Black male teachers. Victor reported that he described his focus group experience to other male teachers at his school in hopes of sparking interest among them in holding similar gatherings. In addition to the 7 participants mentioned, Solomon, who also participated in a focus group session, stated that he wished his focus group experience had been even more engaging, given his desire to connect with fellow Black male educators. Although the focus group experience was not as satisfying as Solomon had hoped, his remark still echoed the desire for more opportunities to interact with other Black men in the profession.

In all, the prospect of working with male principals, the desire for male-centered spaces in schools, and the feedback on the focus group sessions for this study underscored participants' interest in having more interactions with fellow male educators. These male-centered spaces and connections were conceived as potential escapes from women in the workplace as well as opportunities to bond with and possibly support other male and Black male teachers. As with the previously cited accounts of contentious encounters with women colleagues and administrators, the ruminations on more male-centered spaces provided further evidence of gender's potential significance for the men in this study as a node of power and participation in the teaching profession.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As noted earlier in this article, scholarship in the field of Black masculinity studies has chronicled the repercussions of patriarchal definitions of Black manhood on Black men and Black communities. Through a conceptual engagement with that scholarship, this article uncovered unique insights into the role of patriarchal gender norms in the lives and careers of the men in this study. Inquiries into definitions of and attitudes toward

gender identity across the life span revealed a general inattention to male privilege, essentialist constructions of gender difference, and phallogocentric notions of power among 7 of the men in this study. That the majority of participants spoke in some salient manner to the influence of patriarchal discourses beyond their teaching experiences indicates that these discourses have permeated the multiple social contexts of these men's lives and have filtered into their navigations of predominantly female professional spaces. Building on the antipatriarchal conceptual thrust of Black masculinity studies, this finding suggests that efforts to understand the challenges facing Black male teachers must begin to explicitly acknowledge patriarchal notions of gender as the products of lifelong socialization processes that leave indelible, though not necessarily immutable, imprints on Black men's gender identities and ideologies. Doing so may allow Black male teachers, as well as those who prepare and support them, to appreciate more fully the urgency of bringing antipatriarchal lenses to bear on the work of Black men in the profession.

In another nod to the salience of patriarchal notions of gender, the accounts cited throughout this article captured snapshots of Black patriarchal reactions to the dubious offense of female authority. The epithets toward women in power, the descriptions of hormonally induced female flippancy, the equation of female authority with emasculation, the phallogocentric definition of that authority as inherently flawed, and the masculinist posturing to attenuate the reach of that authority cast the influence and leadership of women in schools, when unchecked by male-imposed constraints, as affronts to patriarchal sensibilities. In addition to illustrating the need to understand patriarchal notions of gender as products of lifelong socialization processes, this article suggests that those who study and work with Black male teachers should take a closer look at how patriarchal ideologies may manifest during interactions with women colleagues and bosses in the predominantly female realm of teaching.

Against the broader backdrop of participants' contentious encounters with women in the workplace, several accounts homed in on specific tensions with Black female colleagues and administrators. These tensions were part of a larger set of study findings that revealed complicated and shifting relational dynamics between study participants and Black women in the workplace and that also pointed to Black women colleagues and administrators as key arbiters of discourses on the roles of Black male teachers.⁶ To date, media accounts on Black male teachers have emphasized these educators' statuses as role models and father figures, and scholarly works on Black men in teaching have focused primarily on these educators' interactions with Black youth. Perhaps unintentionally, both sets of discourses to some extent have reproduced a patriarchal

blind eye to the presence, power, and accomplishments of Black women educators—despite scholarly efforts described earlier in this article to highlight the pedagogical achievements of Black women in teaching—and thus offer minimal insights on how Black male teachers might negotiate their relationships with Black women peers. It is imperative that future work about and with Black men in teaching critically examine the racial and gender politics that emerge between Black male and Black female educators, especially in predominantly Black educational settings where Black women educators may outnumber and outrank their Black male peers, and where Black women educators may have already established gender-mediated pedagogical traditions and institutional cultures that effectively address the needs of Black students. It is also crucial that future work not simply reproduce antagonistic discourses on Black gender relations that ultimately thwart any meaningful progress, but draw instead on Black male and Black female teachers' shared commitment to Black students' academic achievement as a lever for reconciling cross-gender tensions.

Despite this article's commitment to critiques of patriarchal gender norms, another implication of the preceding analysis is that such critiques, though crucial, may not be enough to address the complexities of Black male teachers' professional experiences with gender. As noted earlier, scholarship in Black masculinity studies has explored the sense of emasculation suffered by many Black men in America under White supremacy and capitalist oppression. Although narrative accounts on women in the workplace exhibited strong indications of participants' patriarchal sensibilities, they also revealed the psychosocial stresses of Black masculinity unfulfilled, as study participants bemoaned the emasculating effects of female administrative power and described strategic efforts to resist that power through masculinist posturing. Furthermore, participants' accounts also revealed their professional vulnerability as teachers working in school environments where administrators frequently used their power to curtail teacher autonomy, where women occupied a number of those administrative positions, and/or where the prevalence of women colleagues lent additional influence to women's perspectives, concerns, and judgments. Together, these factors point to the need to develop deeper understandings of how Black male teachers can be marginally situated within schools despite male privilege and how that marginalization presents particular psychosocial stresses for Black men in the profession. This is not to say that a critique of patriarchy should be abandoned or accorded less priority; rather, this is an appeal for future scholarly analyses and support efforts focusing on Black male teachers to wed a critical stance against patriarchal gender ideologies

with an attention to the unique professional and psychosocial challenges that may affect Black men in the profession. These challenges can be easily overlooked in conventional critiques of male privilege that fail to account for the confounding effects of Black masculinity on Black men's precarious and contingent access to patriarchal authority.

The precariousness of Black men's relationship to patriarchy provides an important backdrop for analyzing participants' desire for more male-oriented spaces. Given the occasionally confrontational tenor of participants' encounters with women in the workplace, the desire to have more male-centered spaces and interactions seems understandable yet troublingly linked to a patriarchal reaction to female authority. Although the findings in this article revealed the desire for and affordances of male-centered spaces for reflection and bonding, they also pointed to the potential for these spaces to perhaps uncritically reproduce patriarchal blind spots. These findings suggest at least two tasks for future inquiries into the experiences of Black male teachers: first, the creation of spaces where Black male teachers can bond and vent while still engaging in critical inquiry into their own perspectives and assumptions around gender, and second, the use of those spaces to inform Black male teachers' antipatriarchal engagement with female colleagues and administrators. The success of male-centered spaces will likely depend not only on their function as havens for male teachers, Black and otherwise, but also on their capacity to facilitate male educators' critical participation in the predominantly female realm of teaching.

Finally, it is crucial to underscore that the reach of future efforts to address the dilemmas discussed above will have to extend beyond conversations with and supports for Black men in teaching. Study participants' tense encounters with women administrators unfolded within a milieu in which, unfortunately, conflictual relationships between workers and management were neither new nor limited to Black male teachers and female school leaders. The yearning of teachers in K-12 education for more autonomy and resources to support their day-to-day work experiences has repeatedly run up against the enforcement of institutional constraints by school-level administrators and district-level bureaucrats (Apple, 1986). For urban school districts, scarce financial resources, personnel turnover, and intensified scrutiny under top-down reform mandates have brought additional stresses to contemporary teacher-administrator interactions (Lipman, 2004). Black male teachers may harbor a particular set of patriarchal anxieties that can contribute to antagonistic relationships with women administrators, but they surely do not bear sole responsibility for those antagonisms. Efforts to enable Black male teachers to negotiate more productive gender politics with women in school leadership posi-

tions must be situated within attempts to ameliorate the broader legacy of conflict and mistrust between teachers and administrators in urban schools. Otherwise, institutional cultures that continue to pit workers and management against each other will also continue to breed contentious encounters between Black male teachers and women in positions of power.

CONCLUSION

Recent appeals for efforts to recruit more Black men into teaching have emphasized these educators' positive potential impact on Black youth while turning a blind eye to the gender-mediated politics of participation in a traditionally female profession. In response to that void, this article explored how 11 Black male teachers negotiated complex and sometimes contentious relationships with women in the workplace. Placing gender politics center stage enabled 7 of the men in this study to articulate a general inattention to the significance of male privilege, 6 to describe confrontational encounters with women colleagues and administrators that revealed a disdain for female authority and a willingness to undermine that authority through masculinist posturing, and 8 to express a desire to have access to more male-centered spaces and interactions within the teaching profession. By bringing Black masculinity studies to bear as a conceptual framework, this article was able to critically assess the patriarchal underpinnings of study participants' perspectives on women authority figures while also demonstrating the need to acknowledge and address the underlying psychological burdens associated with Black masculine identity within White supremacist and capitalist social contexts. Through its analyses, this article also raised critical questions that should be considered by researchers, teacher education programs, and school districts that want to understand and support Black male teachers' strategic participation in the gendered participatory politics of contemporary urban schools.

Notes

1. A larger body of scholarship has drawn on masculinity studies to explore the experiences of male teachers in Australian (Martino & Frank, 2006; Mills, 2004; Roulston & Mills, 2000), Canadian (Martino, 2008b; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010), and British (Carrington & Skelton, 2003; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Skelton, 2001) educational contexts. In comparison with this broader corpus of literature, scholarly works that apply a similar analytic lens to the experiences of male teachers in the United States remain relatively slim in number.

2. Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) brought critical lenses on masculinity politics to

bear on their analysis of the experiences of a Black male teacher in Toronto, but similar analyses that account for the cultural discourses on Black masculinity and schooling in an American context have yet to emerge.

3. The works cited here stand in contrast to others within Black masculinity studies that tend to identify an essentialist “return” to hypermasculine and patriarchal forms of manhood as a sign of the cultural and political rehabilitation of Black men in America from the scars of White supremacy (for examples, see Hare & Hare, 1984; Kunjufu, 1986; Madhubuti, 1990).

4. Although all participants identified as men, one participant expressed a preference for being identified racially as Caribbean American even though he recognized that dominant American racial discourses marked him as Black. The author adapted the wording of interview questions for this participant to include “Black and/or Caribbean American,” thus allowing him greater flexibility to respond to questions on his own terms.

5. The prevalence of free or reduced-price meal programs is presented as a proxy for the working-class status of many families served by Brewerton public schools. More specific statistical and demographic data on the Brewerton School District have been withheld in this article to help protect study participants’ anonymity.

6. In addition to the accounts of tense encounters with Black women colleagues and administrators that were shared in this article, several narrative passages described the role of Black women educators in shaping and assessing study participants’ practices as disciplinarians. Mitch and Solomon credited Black female teachers and administrators for helping them to develop effective disciplinary strategies, and Damon recalled the respect he received from Black female teachers once he developed a reputation for having effective classroom management techniques. Damon also characterized some of the Black women on his faculty as “aunties” who performed a familial style of mentoring with him, and Victor described some of his Black female colleagues as sisterlike. On the other hand, Greg discussed the often limited views on Black male teachers as “disciplinarians first” among Black women colleagues, and Victor and Bill described the unfavorable feedback they received from Black women teachers and administrators for not living up to a more authoritarian image of the discipline-intensive Black male educator. All these accounts provide further evidence of the pivotal role that Black women educators played in shaping the teaching experiences of the men in this study.

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APPENDIX A

Data Collection Protocols

First in-depth interview protocol

I. Background and entry into teaching

- 1) Please provide your name and contact information.
- 2) How old are you? Where are you from?
- 3) What was your undergraduate institution(s) and major(s)? What was your graduate institution(s) and field(s)? What type of teacher certification do you have?
- 4) Have you pursued any other careers besides teaching? If so, what careers, and when?
- 5) How long have you been teaching? What grades and subjects have you taught? In what geographic locations and at what schools have you taught? Have you assumed responsibility for any extracurricular activities? Do you have, or have you had, any administrative experiences or responsibilities?
- 6) When did you first consider teaching as a career? At that time, what messages had you received about teaching as a profession, and how did those messages affect you?
- 7) Why did you ultimately decide to become a teacher? What responses did you receive from others when you decided to become a teacher?
- 8) What do you enjoy about teaching, and what do you not enjoy?
- 9) How would you describe your current school and students to an outsider?

II. Identities (Probe for stories, situations, etc., to illustrate themes.)

- 10) While this study is focusing on the experiences of Black male teachers, I do not want to assume that all participants identify themselves with labels like “Black” and “male.” How do you identify yourself racially? Do you also claim an ethnic identity that is different from or more specific than your racial identity?
- 11) How do you identify in terms of gender?
- 12) How would you describe the relationship between these identities for you personally? Are they intertwined, or do you ever “experience” each identity separately? Is one more important to you than the other?
- 13) What messages did you receive as a child about what it meant to be [race/ethnicity] and [gender]? As a teenager? As a young adult? Where did those messages come from?
- 14) How has being [race/ethnicity] and [gender] shaped you as a person? Do these identities shape your view of the world? Your relationships with other people? Your daily life? Your self-image?
- 15) So far I have focused on race and gender. Are there other identity categories that play a major role in how you define yourself and/or how you see and experience the world? (Use #13 and #14 to tease out responses to this.)
- 16) Is there anything I didn’t ask you about the topics of this interview that you think I should consider?

Second in-depth interview protocol

Probe for stories, situations, etc., to illustrate themes.

- 1) In what ways, if any, did being [race/ethnicity] and [gender] influence your decision to become a teacher?
- 2) How, if at all, has being [race/ethnicity] and [gender] influenced your:
 - teaching practices (pedagogical stance, curriculum design, classroom management, instructional techniques, etc.)
 - relationships & interactions with students (by gender, by race, by grade, etc.)
 - relationships & interactions with colleagues
 - relationships & interactions with parents
- 3) Do you consider yourself a role model as a [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teacher? If so, for whom and in what ways? If not, why? Do you consider yourself a father figure? Explain.

- 4) Are there other ways in which being [race/ethnicity] and [gender] has shaped your experiences as a teacher? Are there other moments when you feel the impact of being a [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teacher? Does being a [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teacher ever work in your favor? Does it ever work to your disadvantage?
- 5) What types of support networks did you have access to as a teacher-in-training, and were they able to provide support that addressed your needs as a [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teacher? Explain.
- 6) What types of support networks do you presently have access to as a teacher, and are they able to provide support that addresses your needs as a [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teacher? Explain.
- 7) Are there support networks or structures not currently in place that you would like to see established for [race/ethnicity] and [gender] teachers? Explain.
- 8) Is there anything I didn't ask you about the topics of this interview that you think I should consider?

Third in-depth interview protocol

- 1) What stands out for you in your teaching experience as the school year comes to a close? Can you offer anecdotes to illustrate those issues?
- 2) What plans do you have for the summer?
- 3) Why did you agree to participate in this study? What led you to volunteer your participation?
- 4) Which aspects of this study did you find most engaging, thought-provoking, and/or enjoyable? Why?
- 5) Which aspects of this study could have been conducted differently? What suggestions do you have for how follow-up studies on this topic should be pursued?
- 6) What do you hope will come of this study? Who should be the audience for this study, and what do you hope that audience will gain?

Focus group protocol

- 1) Context: I'm going to raise some of themes that have emerged during the one-on-one interviews that I've conducted for this study. These themes revolve around the significance of being a Black male teacher. Not only will this focus group give you a chance to revisit some of the issues from the earlier interviews, but it will also give you an opportunity to listen and respond to each other. In fact, the main goals of this focus group are to allow all of you to discuss the importance of being a Black male teacher with other Black male teachers and to see what insights are generated when Black male teachers collectively examine their experiences.
- 2) Introductions: Please state your name and describe something you plan to do this summer.
- 3) Describe one incident from the past year that speaks to the significance and/or impact of your presence as a Black male teacher. This can involve students, colleagues, parents, etc., and it can be something that took place in school or outside of school.
- 4) How would you compare or contrast the relationships you have with Black male students to the relationships you have with other students?
 - Do you feel pressure and/or a responsibility to pay particular attention to Black boys? If so, where does this pressure and/or sense of responsibility come from? Do you think this is fair?
 - How much time and energy are devoted to Black boys versus other groups?
 - Are interactions with Black male students a source of fulfillment? A source of stress? Is there some other way to characterize these interactions?
- 5) To what extent do you feel like you are expected as a Black male teacher to be a father figure and/or a disciplinarian?
 - Is this expectation higher of Black male teachers than of other teachers in the schools in which you teach? If so, is this fair?
 - How do you deal with discipline? What are your strategies?
 - How (if at all) do you approach being a father figure?
 - Are these roles sources of fulfillment? Sources of stress? Is there some other way to characterize these roles?
- 6) What are your relationships like with other adults at your school? Are there any trends that stand out based on race, gender, subject matter, level of authority, etc.?
- 7) How can urban schools recruit, retain, and support Black male teachers? Can you remember any recruitment strategies that appealed to you? Can you think of any strategies that might appeal to Black men at various career stages?

- When/where should recruitment begin? Who should do it?
- What types of supports are in place now? What supports work? What supports don't work? What new supports can you imagine?

APPENDIX B

Sample Transcription Coding—Focus Group Excerpt

Codes: W-C-H = Women, colleagues, hormonal; W-IP-C = Women, in power, conflicts with; W-IP-MR = Women, in power, masculinist responses to; W-IP-SM = Women, in power, issues with strong men

AUTHOR: Any other thoughts on relationships with colleagues, and how they help to form your role, your identity, your place in the school?...

KARL: I've been thinking about this a lot lately because me and my principal have just been going at it the last couple of months. I feel like she's kind of afraid of me a little bit, and because she's afraid of me she approaches me very, like, with attitude [Greg: mmm-hmm]. And it's to the point where like, one time I literally had to say "Who are you talking to?" and walk away from her before I cussed her out... [W-IP-C]

GREG: Yeah, I think have almost the opposite. My principal, a White woman, she speaks . . . a lot of the staff members have said they don't like the way that she speaks to them. And I said, "Well why do you allow her to speak to you in such a way?" And she's never spoken to me in such a way. There was only one incident where she raised her voice and [chuckle] we were on the phone and I said [G. raises his voice], "Excuuuse me?" [W-IP-MR] And she paused and then she [All: laughter] lulled a bit and then, you know, went on with the conversation. But I don't know [All: laughter], I don't know if it's because I'm a Black man—I think so—that she doesn't speak to me in such a way. When I said excuse me, she said "Oh well" and went on with the conversation, but she lowered her tone. [W-IP-MR] But yeah, I think she doesn't do that because I'm a Black male teacher.

AUTHOR: Was that just an instinctual reaction, or did you do that intentionally?

GREG: Who, mine? Oh no, I did it intentionally, intentionally, to let her know you got the wrong one. Like, wait a minute. [W-IP-MR] Because literally, five teachers have said that on various occasions, at least twice, that she has spoken to them in an inappropriate manner where their feelings were hurt. One of my mottos in life is people treat you the way you allow them to treat you. And you know, I said if you don't like it, say something. She's just the principal.

KARL: Thinking about my principal, I feel like she . . . I don't wanna say this without sounding . . . but I'll just say it. I feel like she realizes my power because I am very influential over my kids, and they will listen to me 35 times before they will listen to her. I mean I told you [to author] about this in my interview. I feel like she realizes the power that I have over them, and I feel like it really makes her feel intimidated. [W-IP-C]

GREG: Mmm-hmm. Intimidated, yes.

OLIVER: I definitely think that women who are in authoritative positions in the school district or in school have this thing with strong men. They have to assert themselves and the only way they can do it is if they try to pull you down a peg or two in front of the others [Greg: mmm-hmm] or in front of somebody else. [W-IP-SM] I think we as men have to stand up and say you're not [inaudible] [Greg: yeah, mmm-hmm]. [W-IP-MR] You could be [the superintendent], you don't come and tell me what to do in my classroom in front of my students. You can pull me aside and talk outside, but not. . .

VICTOR: [To Greg] So give us some tips. [All: chuckle]

GREG: I mean, you know, just like when the principal was raising her voice at me. . .

VICTOR: Yeah, and you said excuse me, right.

GREG: I used my bass to say excuse me. . . [W-IP-MR]

VICTOR: How about the shouting colleague? You ever get the testy colleague that's like . . . and sometimes you don't if they're just PMS-ing or whatever the case is, [W-C-H] but how do you like. . . Like the other day I have a colleague. . .

AUTHOR: A female colleague, right?

VICTOR: Yeah, a female colleague. [All: chuckles] We teach the same kids. She'll routinely send kids to me, like she's having a time out. So I sent a kid to her, or a kid had been with me, so I didn't want to have that kid because I had been with him all day, so I sent him, and she's like "Why are you sending me. . . ?" I'm like, he was just with me the whole period. So then she starts shouting, and I kind of did what you [to Greg] did. [W-IP-MR] I didn't say excuse me, but somehow I'm like, "You know what, fine, send him back over. I'm not going to argue with you about it." And she kept him, and came back later. I think she felt bad because she shouted

. . . or I put my . . . she shouted at me, then I put my bass [W-IP-MR], and then she got convicted or whatever.

AUTHOR: Quincy, you had something to say and then we'll move on.

QUINCY: It's weird because I don't have a lot of these interactions. Anytime [the female administrators] have ever tried to get out of sorts, they instantly apologize without me having to say anything. Like I just kind of look at them like "There must be something wrong going on here." [W-IP-MR] So, you know, they'll be like "Oh I'm sorry." My female colleagues—Black, White, whatever—they get it all the time, you know what I'm saying. Anytime there's a little power trip issue like that, it's instantly popping off like that. But for me, as I said, anytime they even get a little bit out of sorts, either they'll apologize instantly right there, or they'll come back and apologize 5 minutes later or whatever. . . . It just is that instant kind of "Oops, I did something wrong, I need to check myself." And for me I just kind of stand and say "Alright, it's fine with me, just don't do it again." [W-IP-MR]

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